Federal Government Jobs:

Finding and Securing Permanent Positions

Created by the Career Center and the Public Interest and Pro Bono Office
Where are the lawyers? (and the jobs)

- Most in executive branch
- Some in independent agencies
- Some in legislative branch
- Some in judicial branch
Types of Work

- **Litigation**
  DOJ & US Attorney, some agencies, some with coordinate jurisdiction

- **Regulatory**
  Create & implement rules and regulations

- **Advisory**
  Advise and counsel, congressional inquiry, FOIA etc.

- **Public Policy**
  Look beyond attorney positions. PMF (Presidential Management Fellowship) opportunity.
Competitive Service vs. Exempted Service

- **Competitive Service** - majority of federal employees, hired through OPM. Open positions on USAjobs.gov
- **Exempted Service** - ALL attorney positions. Agencies may hire without using OPM (USAjobs.gov) or posting jobs. This is a more streamlined process.

Only 20% of attorney job openings in the federal government are advertised.
Post-graduate Positions

- Direct Hiring (lawyer and non-lawyer positions). SOME agencies allow 3Ls to apply but others require graduation and bar passage.

- Honors Programs (only way in as a new lawyer to many agencies. For some, may help to have spent a summer there or come from a clerkship).

- Presidential Management Fellows (PMF)
Some of the BEST Resources

- Government Honors & Internship Guide (see Appendix) -
  http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm
- USA Jobs - http://www.usajobs.gov/
- PSLawNet.org – collection of resources, available to all Duke students via Duke subscription
- Partnership for Public Service: Making the Difference
  http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalcareer
- Westlaw (database of agencies)

TIP: ALWAYS go to agency websites too.
Top 10 Agencies for Hiring

Partnership for Public Service
http://data.wherethejobsare.org/wtja/field/1489

- DOJ
- Department of Homeland Security
- Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)
- Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
- Treasury
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Federal Trade Commission
- Social Security Administration
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Labor

Also DOD and Veteran’s Affairs.
Timing of Applications

- **Post graduate positions:**
  - Honors program: start early in fall semester
  - Direct Hire: start in spring OR after bar
  - Some agencies attend OCI at Duke
The Unpublished Job Market

- Networking
- TARGETED mailings can work in the federal government
  (To alums, Regional Directors, and others)
  Use EMAIL as mail may not get there!
- Have a strong cover letter (mission, skills, why you)
TIP: On-Line Applications

May use word recognition software to screen for words in your resume and KSAs from the job description.

(Note: After November 2010, agencies are no longer using KSAs)
Resumes

- Target your resume
- Pay attention to keywords in job description
- Be concise but more detail and length allowed than standard resume (on-line version could easily be several pages; hard copy 2-3)
- Use numbers to highlight accomplishments and quantify results
- Think about what is measurable in your experience

Do not make them work to find your experience relevant!
Do grades matter?

Yes and No

- US Attorneys - trial skills trump grades
- SEC - grades matter
- DOJ - varies by division

As with any job, the complete candidate makes the impact with experience, leadership, interest ….
After the application

- Candidates often get screening interview
- Second interviews (sometimes team or panel)
- Know why you are interested and want to do the kind of work
- Be prepared for behavioral interviews
On-line or targeted applications

The government is mission driven. They should know why you want to work there.
Grades and Steps

- Salaries on the General Schedule (grades)
  New law graduates usually GS-9 or GS-11
- There are steps within each grade allowing for increases
- May also get locality pay
- Grades rarely negotiable but steps may be (based on experience, coursework, …)

Expect to be asked, “If we offer this, will you take it?” They ask because they must write hiring memo to H.R. to determine grade and step.
Benefits

- Tend to be good
- Generally non-negotiable
- Vacation may be negotiable (example: based on a prior clerkship)
Security Clearance

- Most attorneys must pass Investigation
- Start the process as soon as possible
- Be forthcoming
- Problems: back taxes, loan defaults, felonies, failure to register for selective service
- Drug use is a problem with some agencies (timing, type, and frequency all play a role)
Other considerations:

- Duke in DC & externships may be excellent ways to connect inside an agency
- Some agencies have loan repayment
Legal Positions (non-attorney)

- Consider civil service jobs that do not require a law degree:
  Paralegal, Hearings and Appeals Specialist, Contract Specialist, Labor Relations Specialist, Estate Tax Examiner, Analyst
- Once in, easy to move up and around. And, to network!
Judge Advocate General (JAG Corps.)

- Immediate responsibility
- Exposure to a wide variety of legal areas
- Various branches separate:
  - Air Force
  - Army
  - Coast Guard
  - Marine
  - Navy

See handout with for more information.
Prosecutors and Defenders Offices

- PSLawNet.org
  http://www.pslawnet.org/prosecutor-publicdefendercareers
Presidential Management Fellows Program (PMF)

- Competitive program that recruits for policy and management jobs (not attorney positions). Apply in fall and must be nominated by school.
- After application, series of tests and interviews to get to finalist stage.

https://www.pmf.opm.gov/
Jobs on the Hill

- Great resource: Yale Law School Capitol Hill Guide
  Includes list of resources for job postings and background research.
- Political Positions (personal offices, committee work, party work)
  NETWORK!!!
- Non-political positions (legislative counsel, Senate or House Counsel, Library of Congress)
Judicial Branch Jobs

- Clerkships and summer internships are most common for graduates and law students.
- For more information, please see the extensive resources on the Career Center website and attend programs.
- Meet with Robert Barton in Career Center.
Lessons learned from Alumni:

- Government Honors Programs (summer or clerkship really help)
- How to contact alums (through us or on your own)
- How can alumni help? You may have someone who can tell you about openings and/or speak for you inside.
- Consider non-attorney positions
- Easy to move up, and around, when in